

Cross-Party Group on Outdoor Education

12 September 2024 – 13:00-14:00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP – Chair

Rachel Hamilton MSP

Invited guests

David McLean – Sense Scotland

Sophie McSkimming – Sense Scotland

Dawne Morrison – Strathclyde University

Nadine McCann – Sense Scotland

Samuel Biggart – Kibble

Iona McCroary – Etive House

Fiona Robertson - Denbeath Primary School

Non-MSP Group Members

Neil Baird – Scouts Scotland

Rory Edwards – Scouts Scotland

Freda Fallon – Outward Bound

Jamie Miller – SOEC

Kevin Marsh – Craikhope Outdoor Centre

Ian McCall – Paths for All

Pete Moir - DofE

Alan Mackay – DofE

Kate Somervail - DofE

Phil Thompson – Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre

Paul Bayton - SU Scotland

Mike Harvey – Office of Liz Smith MSP

Nick March – Outdoor Learning Edinburgh

Rachel Luxton – SU Scotland

William Stephen – SAPOE

Apologies

Peter Wilson – Ardentinney

Beatrice Wishart MSP

Mark Ruskell MSP

David Exeter – Outward Bound

Jane Campbell Morrison - SAAF

Agenda item 1

Welcome and update by Liz Smith MSP

Liz Smith MSP welcomed attendees and provided a positive update on the Outdoor Residentials (Scotland) Bill, intimating that the committee would now gather evidence to consider next steps.

Liz thanked organisations for responding to the recent consultation regarding the Bill.

Liz then introduced the main topic for the meeting - best practice in Special Educational Needs and disability provision in Outdoor Education with a view to considering how Scotland can best meet those needs in future.

Agenda item 2

Presentations and Discussion

Iona McCroary the Principal Teacher of Etive House, gave the first presentation on best practice in outdoor education provision for autistic children.

Key points included:

- Etive House's commitment to the Salamanca Statement and ethos of the Muir report – that schools and teachers should be empowered to provide a curriculum that best suits their local context and the needs of all their learners.
- How Etive House has embraced the Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability initiative to embrace the outdoor learning available on its doorstep across its curriculum.
- That the outcomes of any outdoor residential programme for pupils with SEN will be most successful only when it is an integrated part of that curriculum, with both preparation and follow-up.
- How Etive House have embraced partners to develop and implement that rich curriculum. Examples included:
 - Working with the Food for Thought Education Fund, Stem Nation and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Forest Ranger's programme to deliver STEM and life skills programmes.
 - Work with SOEC and Outward Bound to design day and residential outdoor programmes that best support young people with SEN to achieve.
 - Community programmes working alongside Active Stirling and Avon Outdoors which have led some young people to achieve by going beyond traditional curriculum boundaries to embrace project and sports-based learning.
 - Etive House's dedicated SEN Scout Group, which is supporting young people to achieve both in the community and at residential.

Iona concluded her presentation with an appeal for greater visibility and celebration of the achievements of young people with SEN to support development of best practice.

Jamie Miller, the CEO of Scottish Outdoor Education Centres, led the next presentation on meeting the needs of different types of disability groups at residential centres. Key points included:

- The need to adapt to Special Education Needs at a cultural level, across every aspect of the centre experience down to signage and toilets.
- How this was being achieved through staff training at SOEC, where they came together to identify and address needs as well as develop strategies to focus on young people's strengths to ensure everyone can achieve.
- The importance of partnership working to address challenges, including working with external experts such as Equal Adventure as well as with schools and groups in advance of visits.
- The need for investment to fund adaptation and the incredible potential of outdoor education to be a leveller among young people of different ability levels when this is realised.

Jamie finished his presentation by sharing two case studies of SOEC's work in practice, outlining how they worked with Deaf Action to support staff to learn BSL ahead of a visit by hearing impaired young people, and their work with Branch Out Together to create a transition to work programme for ASD learners.

Phil Thompson of Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre then introduced Fiona Robertson of Denbeath Primary School, who spoke regarding on their co-designed tool that helped one neuro-diverse pupil overcome anxiety ahead of a residential experience.

Phil started the presentation by sharing the outcome of a small survey he had done among visitors to Ardroy to attempt to explain the 10-15% dropoff in young people with booked places attending the centre. This pointed to anxiety being a key driver.

He agreed to share this data with MSPs before introducing Fiona who provided more detail on the accessibility tool they had developed. Fiona explained:

- How the tool had been inspired by a similar tool at Dynamic Earth, This was a place the neuro-diverse young person had struggled to visit previously but had enjoyed on a second visit when he was better able to make choices on how to engage with the experience by being provided with more information up front.

- How they developed their bespoke tool in partnership ahead of the young person's visit. It included a map of the centre, photographs of accommodation, a timetable, what choices were available in terms of activities and meals, what to expect at each activity, and what the pupil would need to bring for each.
- How the tool worked by putting agency into the hands of the young person, allowing them to make informed choices about their visit and activity programme.
- How they aimed high with huge success, with the young person staying for the whole week and hugely enjoying his time at Ardroy.

Phil closed the presentation explaining that Ardroy has now made the tool accessible online for other neuro-diverse pupils, receiving excellent feedback.

Pete Moir, Scottish Operations Manager of Duke of Edinburgh, gave the final presentation on supporting young people with additional support needs to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh programme. Key points included:

- How expeditions were a key focus of DofE's accessibility work, leading to their expedition guidelines being re-written to be more inclusive, getting rid of prescriptive language like "must" and "should".
- How the introduction of an ASN network was successful in sharing learning across the organisation.
- The importance of targeted funding to support young people with Additional Support Needs, and in particular the success DofE have had dedicating specific resource to work with marginalised young people.

DofE's Alan Mackay, who leads on their Scottish inclusion work by supporting organisations to deliver the DofE award for young people in their context, then introduced colleagues from two organisations that work with DofE.

- Kibble who work with marginalised young people - who shared a transformative story of young people's participation in the DofE programme, including one young person who went from sitting alone and isolated at home to developing a love of walking and becoming a volunteer at a local food bank.
- Sense Scotland who support young people with complex needs – who shared a story of another young person who despite not being able to read learned to use maps to a high level, which led to them supporting a group of other young people from a high achieving school to find their way on an expedition.

Pete concluded his presentation by pointing to two key take homes, the importance of partnership working in delivering SEN provision (in particular by supporting school staff to empower them to support children outdoors) and how many of the stories heard by the group will have been firsts for the young people with SEN involved, all of whom have the capacity to achieve.

Agenda item 3

Closing and next meeting date

Liz Smith MSP brought the meeting to a close, thanking speakers for their inspiring stories and members for their participation.

Due to limited time for discussions following the presentations due to chamber business Liz asked all questions to be submitted through Scouts Scotland.